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## Review of The Trial of Leanard Peltier.

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*The Trial of Leonard Peltier.* By Jim Messerschmidt. Foreword by William Kunstler. Boston: South End Press, 1983, 1989. Photograph, maps, notes, index. xxi + 198 pp. \$10.00.

On 26 June 1975 in a firefight on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation between the FBI and AIM, two FBI agents were killed. AIM member Leonard Peltier and three other Indians were arrested. Only Peltier was convicted. *The Trial of Leonard Peltier* carefully documents the trial in its social and historical context.

If the reader had any doubts whether this book advocates for American Indians, William Kunstler's foreword quickly dispels them. The advocacy perspective is reinforced in the preface by Ward Churchill, co-author of *Agents of Oppression: The FBI's Secret Wars Against the Black Panther Party and The American Indian Movement*. The tone thus set, Messerschmidt begins chapter 1 with "Leonard Peltier is a political prisoner" (p. 1). In chapter 2, "The FBI," he documents how and why ". . . the FBI has, from its inception, denied, through direct criminal actions, anti-capitalist activists their first amendment rights" (p. 11). "The Trial" (chapter 3) "investigate(s) the most important evidence and testimony presented at the 1977 trial . . . and "examines the way procedural rules of evidence were used to manipulate the outcome . . . and mask the criminal acts of the state" (p. 37). It documents in scholarly fashion the degree to which the Peltier trial was a "travesty of justice." Chapter 4 briefly chronicles the events pointing to an alleged FBI plot to murder Peltier in prison. Chapter 5 broadens the focus from Peltier and the FBI to conflicts inherent in the goals of AIM and the economic and political interests of corporate America. The clear implication is that the FBI and the court system are being subverted to block the conservationist goals of traditionalist Indians and thus expand the corporate exploitation of both conventional and alternative energy sources on Indian lands. The 1989 afterword updates Pel-

tier's legal efforts, including the refusal in 1987 by the U.S. Supreme Court to hear his appeal. The final question is who is "ascendant in America," the people or the police?

Whether the reader accepts the author's theses or dismisses them as radical rhetoric, this third printing of Peltier's experience is significant in this period in U.S. history. It raises important issues that should be discussed and debated: 1. A democratic government's obligations to national security versus citizens' right to know. 2. The right of Americans to dissent. 3. The rethinking of the relationship between white society and Indian culture, particularly in light of the 1992 Columbus centennial celebrations. And finally, 4. The role of Indian values concerning the preservation of the earth and species survival.

Messerschmidt begins with a shootout in 1976 on an isolated ranch in South Dakota, takes us through investigation, trial, conviction, and appeal in the criminal justice system, and finally leads us to the global issues that precede, surround, and are born of Peltier's struggle. The journey is a difficult one, filled with doubt and danger, one we would rather not undertake, but it seems a necessary one if we wish to survive through the next century.

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